

In the
Desperate
Kingdom of
Love

Poems 2001–2004

By Brad Sachs



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In the Desperate Kingdom of Love

Poems 2001–2004

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Wish

Sometimes it's obvious
My children want me dead.
I can taste the thick, wet joy
That would run down their chins
And stain their rent shirts.
Sure, they'd be sad
But the horizon that would be revealed
As the fat father cloud finally dispersed
Would fill them with awe
And godly grandeur.
For now, though,
They're stuck in the endless inclemence
Their flat stares piercing the rain
That I bring down on them
With my remaining might
And my woeful claps of thunder.

At the Motor Vehicle Administration

My 15 year old son
Leaves me behind
To enter the testing room:
“Applicants Only”
I wish him luck
Then retreat to a bench
Leafing lifelessly through the paper
Then pitching it aside
Preferring to pace, instead,
Passing other teens,
Their grave, pimpled faces
Scrunched as they study
Their dog-eared handbooks
Their mothers and fathers
Hovering nearby,
My fellow, restless angels
Perched on the edge of irrelevance.
Over the loudspeaker system comes
Carole King’s keening lament:
*“It’s too late, baby,
Oh, it’s too late,”*
I wake up from my reverie
To see my son
Striding towards me
With a grin:
“20 out of 20!” he reports,
Slightly amazed, so pleased with himself
Do I shake his hand?
Or hug him?
Our bodies bump and fumble together
Then we go sit and wait
To be called to the cashier
*“Something inside has died
And I can’t hide*

*And I just can't fake it,
It's too late..."*
His turn,
I eagerly fish
The forty-five dollars from my wallet
Hand them over to him
Happy to finally be of some service
And watch him handle
Another encounter with the world
All by himself
As the bent bills
Flutter their green goodbyes

Gratitude

His wife is why
He doesn't pull off the highway some night
And enter a small bar-and-grille
About a mile off the road
Bright neon signs in each frosted window
Sit down at a table
In a dark corner
Order hot food and cold beer
And eye the woman
Sitting alone at the table nearby
Eventually joining her
Talking in low voices
Knives and forks clicking
On the porcelain plates
Then pay for their meals
With a large bill,
Holding the door for her as they leave,
And follow her down dusty roads
To her small house
Where they drink red wine
And listen to Ray Charles
Until she is suddenly next to him
And she puts her soft lips on his
And puts his hand on her breast
And he feels the jumping in his heart
And it couldn't be sweeter
A long night of new, candlelit love
And he wakes in the white glare
To black coffee
On the night-table
And a note:

“Please lock up on your way out:
P.S. And I never want to see you again.”
And he dresses silently,
Goes out to his car
Gets lost returning to the highway
Sheepishly stops to get directions
And is jerked by a sudden thought
Reaches quickly for his wallet
And finds
To his immense disgrace,
That all of his money remains

Labor Day

For Anne Sachs

Labor Day weekend
And my grandmother,
A hospital secretary,
Arrives smiling,
Enters our house laden with supplies
She's quietly lifted from her office
Pens, pencils, bright white pads
Shiny paper clips, rainbow rubber bands,
And flawless pink erasers...
My brothers and I,
Frantic with impending loss
As the last air empties out
Of summer's huge balloon
Dive for them as desperately
As we do for the donuts
She usually brings
And she stands and marvels
As we try to melt the melancholy
That surrounds our hearts
While September's notebook awaits
Our clumsy script

Run

One fall Sunday in high school
I looked up the address
Of the girl I was secretly in love with,
Sealed the numbers in my mind,
Laced up my running shoes
And took off...

I remember nothing
Of the miles and miles of hilly road
Only that my heart did not seem to wildly awaken
Until I turned the corner onto her street
And began counting down
Number after number
Until, suddenly,
I was there.

No palace, no castle, no cliffside villa
Could have risen as white and luminous
As her house
And the instant awareness that
She slept her beautiful sleep
And dreamed her tender dreams
Behind one of those silent, second-story windows...
It was more than I could bear.
Fearful of being seen
And having to explain,
I reluctantly turned and departed.

Is it possible,
As I seem to recall,
That during my long return
My feet never touched the ground
The wondrous ground?

Late-Night Confessions of Bruce Springsteen

Do you want to know what loneliness is?
Loneliness is standing on stage
Listening to thousands of strangers
Shout your name—"Bruuuuuu-ce!!!"
And thinking it sounds like "Bruise"

No one would believe my dreams
Especially the one where my mother
Stands in the rain
And smells like rain
And I call to her
But she doesn't move

Sometimes, I stare at myself in the mirror
And see my father's creased forehead
The lines like furrows
In a field of rage

I've sat and watched cartoons with my children,
Hour after hour,
And felt like I wanted to sob the entire time

Once, in high school,
I spent a whole week
Avoiding a girl who liked me
And then watched her fall in love
With someone else
My heart reduced to ashes

Sometimes, my wife thinks I'm up in the studio
Writing songs, recording,
But I'm really taking a nap

Every now and then,
In the middle of a show,
With no forewarning
I slip outside of myself
And watch myself,
And listen to myself
And marvel at how
I disgrace myself

How will I ever file
All of these photographs of me?

I'm still not sure
How to ask my wife
To make love
When I'm not sure
She wants to

Some nights
Across the fields
I hear a train
And the longing
Just about kills me
And I think
I'll never sleep...

For His Daughter

“But did he know he was dying?”
She asks, again,
And I say, “Of course,”
But she frowns and shakes her head
And dreams back to the months of decline
When time circled us like a slow moon
When the mantle slid away
And revealed him
In all of his softness,
And she could sleep again in the fine warmth
Of her father’s arms
When the last darkness washed off
The river of rage
And it flowed again like love
Across the high hills of her heart

And only then does she cry, cry
Because there were so many questions she wanted to ask
And so many things she wanted to say

Accommodation

What I Want...

To wake up in a strange place
A garden fractured by sunlight
The air soft and filled with music
And loaves of bread on tables
With roses and bowls of butter and honey

What I Need...

A dream of an ancient garden
Surrounding a house of songs
In a courtyard of wet stones
Perfect ruins where
The wind blows the scent of orchids
And the rain soaks my sleep

What I Get...

Cookies and a glass of Ovaltine
My wife's feet on my lap
The Weather Channel on TV
A storm on the way
My fingers between her stubby toes